

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 OC-05 CCO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SY-05 TRSE-00 /075 W

----- 026540

R 090919Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO /SECSTATE WASHDC 6224

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY ROME

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EFIN, ET, IT

SUBJECT: ITALIAN CURRENCY TRAFFICKERS ARRESTED

1. EPMG ARRESTED TWO ITALIANS AUGUST 28 ON CHARGES OF ILLICIT CURRENCY TRAFFICKING. THE LOCAL PRESS REPORTED THAT THE TWO MEN WERE CAUGHT "RED-HANDED" WITH ETH. \$1,029,900 (JUST OVER 500,000 US DOLLARS) THEY HAD COLLECTED FROM "CERTAIN FOREIGN NATIONALS WHOSE ENTERPRISES WERE TRANSFERRED TO PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IN LINE WITH ETHIOPIAN SOCIALISM." ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE MEN CLAIMED TO BE ON THE STAFF OF AN EMBASSY, PLANNED TO CONVERT THE MONEY TO FOREIGN CURRENCY ON THE BLACK MARKET AND SMUGGLE IT OUT OF ETHIOPIA VIA DIPLOMATIC POUCH.

2. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT MONEY WAS COLLECTED PRIMARILY FROM ITALIAN BUSINESSMEN ATTEMPTING TO TRANSFER SOME WEALTH OUT OF ETHIOPIA PRIOR TO FLEEING THE COUNTRY. REPORTEDLY UP TO FIFTY SMALL BUSINESSMEN PER WEEK INCLUDING BOTH EXPATRIATES-- PRINCIPALLY ITALIANS-- AND ETHIOPIANS ARE ATTEMPTING TO CROSS THE BORDER TO FRENCH TERRITORY OF AFARS AND ISSAS OR OTHER BORDERING NATIONS. COMMENT: THIS FIGURE APPEARS TO BE QUITE HIGH TO US. WHILE NUMEROUS BUSINESSMEN FLED OR TRIED TO FLEE ETHIOPIA AFTER THE WAVE OF NATIONALIZATIONS DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 1975, THE

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NUMBER CURRENTLY ATTEMPTING TO LEAVE IS BELIEVED TO BE SMALL.

END COMMENT.

3. ITALIAN EMBASSY OFFICIAL CONFIRMED TO EMBOFF THAT THE TWO ARRESTEES WERE ITALIAN EMBASSY STAFF EMPLOYEES. OFFICIAL WAS UPSET BY DEVELOPMENTS, INDICATED STORY AS REPORTED IN PRESS WAS BASICALLY ACCURATE AND STATED HE BELIEVED THE MEN GUILTY AS CHARGED. HE CHARACTERIZED TWO MEN AS "STUPID" AND STATED THEY HAD BEEN ACTING ENTIRELY ON THEIR OWN, EMPHASIZING THAT THE ITALIAN EMBASSY WAS NOT REPEAT NOT ASSISTING ITALIAN CITIZENS TO SMUGGLE CURRENCY OUT OF ETHIOPIA.

4. ITALIAN EMBASSY OFFICIAL EXPRESSED FEAR THAT EPMG MIGHT ATTEMPT TO CREATE MAJOR ISSUE OVER THE INCIDENT BUT SAID THUS FAR THE PROBLEM HAD NOT INTERFERED WITH GENERAL ITALIAN-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS.

5. THE INVOLVEMENT OF ITALIAN EMBASSY EMPLOYEES AND THE POTENTIAL USE OF THE ITALIAN DIPLOMATIC POUCH HAS TOUCHED OFF RUMORS THAT THE EPMG WILL NOW BEGIN SEARCHING DIPLOMATIC POUCHES. THERE IS, HOWEVER, NO INDICATION THAT EPMG WILL ATTEMPT SUCH ACTION OR INTERFERE IN OPERATIONS OF EMBASSIES IN ADDIS ABABA IN RESPONSE TO THIS INCIDENT. IN FACT, ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE EPMG HAS ACTED VERY CORRECTLY IN THE FACE OF CONSIDERABLE PROVOCATION. THE ITALIAN COUNSELOR REPORTS THAT BOTH EMPLOYEES HAVE BEEN TREATED WELL, WERE ALLOWED IMMEDIATE CONSULAR ACCESS AND HAVE FEW COMPLAINTS.

6. COMMENT: CURRENCY SMUGGLING ACTION REPORTEDLY INVOLVED MANY MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL ITALIAN COMMUNITY. ITALIANS ARE NOW LYING QUITE LOW IN THE HOPE THAT INCIDENT WILL BE FORGOTTEN.
END COMMENT.
HUMMEL

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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